



First Night

presents

THE HANDEL & HAYDN SOCIETY

CHRISTOPHER HOGWOOD, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-SIXTH SEASON,
1990-91

December 31 at 8:30 p.m. & 10 p.m.
Church of the Advent, Boston

Chorusmaster John Finney
Conducting

HEINRICH SCHÜTZ
(1585 - 1672)

Musikalische Exequien

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685 - 1750)

Motet III: "Jesu, meine Freude" (BWV 227)



PROGRAM NOTES

Johann Sebastian Bach *Jesu meine Freude*, BWV 227

In Bach's day the motet was a consciously old-fashioned form, a holdover from the polyphonic vocal style of the Renaissance. Yet motets—extended choral compositions without independent orchestral accompaniments—were still used on occasion in the Lutheran service, most frequently at funerals. The best-known of Bach's motets, *Jesu meine Freude*, draws its text from two different sources: the eighth chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans; and a familiar Lutheran chorale with a text by Johann Franck and a melody by Johann Crüger, which had first appeared in the 1653 hymnal *Praxis pietatis melica*.

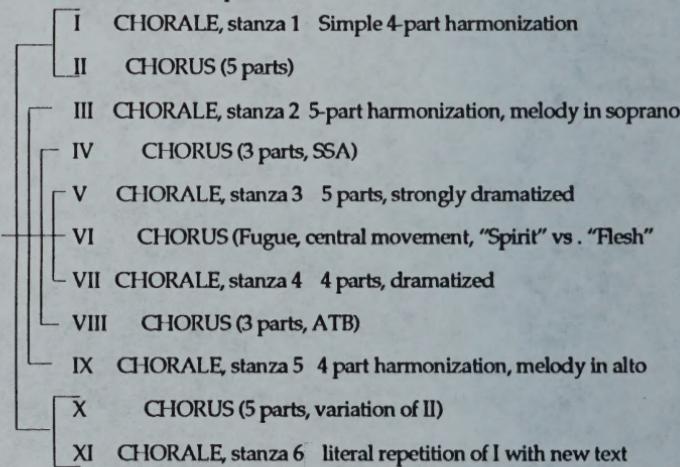
Bach's motet was almost certainly composed for a funeral, since the verse from Romans that comprises the tenth movement of his work was commonly used as the pastor's text for a funeral sermon. But we do not know for sure when the motet was composed or for whom. Nor is it clear why Bach chose the chorale *Jesu meine Freude* for this motet, since it was not a song normally connected with funerals. Possibly he did so in accordance with the wishes of the family of the deceased.

What is clear is that Bach here created one of the great monuments of the choral repertory, sturdy in architectural shape, vivid in expressive effect, and profound in substance. He set all six stanzas of Franck's chorale text, interspersing them with verses from Paul's letter that deal with the opposition between "life in the Spirit" through Christ and "life in the flesh" through the things of the world. Each stanza of the chorale text employs Crüger's tune, though the treatments vary throughout, in reflection of the expressive aim. The last line of the final stanza is the same as the first line of the first stanza, "JesumeineFreude," so that the outset of the work is also its summation.

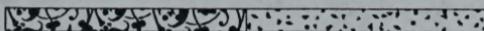
Bach liked to arrange multi-movement compositions in a kind of arch-form, with the movements placed in a mirror image around a central core that is the hinge on which the whole score is balanced. This symmetrical arrangement is often referred to as "chiastic" from the Greek letter chi (X), which is, of course, a kind of cross and therefore especially suitable as a symbolic structure in a work espousing Christian belief.

Bach's chiastic structure is most apparent in the fact that the first and last movements are identical harmonizations of the chorale text. The next inside movements, second and tenth, though not identical, are slightly varied treatments of the same musical material setting very similar passages from Romans. The remaining movements are all balanced, with regard to number of voices and treatment of the chorale melody, around the central fugue (the sixth movement), which deals with the opposition between "Spirit" and "flesh."

An architectonic outline of the eleven movements in *Jesu meine Freude* might appear as follows:



As impressive as Bach's carefully wrought architecture is the way he expresses his text throughout, particularly the light vocal roulades on "Geist" ("Spirit") as opposed to heavier chordal treatment for "Fleisch" ("flesh"). Even more striking is the flexibility with which Bach gives dramatic treatment to individual lines or words even within a chorale harmonization, which would seem to



allow little opportunity for such liberties. Bach wrote music of larger scope, but even in his vast output there is little that surpasses *Jesu meine Freude* in shapeliness, technical aplomb, and expressive power.

Heinrich Schütz

Musikalische Exequien, Opus 7 (SWV 279-281)

Heinrich Schütz composed his largest funeral composition, *Musikalische Exequien* ("Musical Exequies," or, more simply, "Funeral Music"), for the interment on February 4, 1636, of Prince Heinrich Postumus of Reuss, whom the composer had known at least since 1617, when he had advised the prince on the reorganization of music in the town of Gera, in the schools, and at the court. The prince died on December 3, 1645, having secretly made extensive arrangements for his funeral, including the preparation of an elaborate carved coffin and possibly the commissioning of special music from Schütz.

There is some debate as to whether Schütz composed the *Funeral Music* on commission from the Prince himself or from his widow and son. In the preface to the published work, the composer says that the prince had heard his funeral music, though the documented commission comes from his widow and son after his death. Since the work actually consists of three independent pieces, it is perfectly possible for both arrangements to be true: the prince might have requested and heard one part of the score—presumably the first piece—while the rest was actually composed later. In any case, Schütz clearly thought highly of the piece, for he published it soon afterwards—a rare occurrence for music intended for a single occasion—and dignified the publication with an opus number. Yet despite the fact that the *Musikalische Exequien* were composed for the specific funeral of a specific ruler, the careful selection of texts makes the work usable for any memorial service; it is a high-water mark in the history of Protestant funeral music.

The opening—and by far the longest—movement is cast in the form of a German *Missa*, the short form of the Mass that remained current in Lutheran churches. Schütz uses German Biblical

passages to paraphrase the brief Kyrie (preceded by an Introit) and the many sentences of the longer Gloria. This he set in a flexible, on-going way for varying numbers of singers with continuo, sometimes drawing upon plainchant as the melodic background.

The second part sets in motet style a text chosen by the prince as the basis for his funeral sermon, cast as a double chorus in eight parts, performable with or without continuo.

The final movement is more complex. Schütz sets the German *Nunc dimittis*, Simeon's words, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," a traditional expression of the believer's readiness to pass on at the end of a life fully achieved. It is to be sung by the main choir, in five parts. A smaller, distant choir in three parts, possibly intended to represent angels welcoming the deceased to heaven, sings "Blessed are the dead...." It, too, can be sung a cappella.

The shape of the work is unique and remarkable, particularly owing to its careful arrangement of the Biblical passages in the first movement, which is unlike any other funeral composition in existence. But what elevates this work above the merely quotidian is Schütz's extraordinary ability to set the German language to music, to project its natural rhythm and its expressive content in the most direct way possible through solo voice, small ensemble, or the full group, that makes the *Musikalische Exequien* one of the most poignant and consoling of all such compositions. —Steven Ledbetter

Steven Ledbetter is musicologist and program annotator for the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

ENSEMBLE

SOPRANO

Robert Anderson
Jean Danton
Dale Edwards
Rachel Hersey
Silvia Irving
Sharon Kelley

ALTO

Susan Byers
Pamela Dellal
Jeanne McCrorie
Marjorie McDermott

TENOR

Walter Dixon
Martin Kelly
Rockland Osgood
Mark Sprinkle

BASS

Jonathan Barnhart
Hermann Hildebrand
Richard Morrison
Donald Wilkinson

ORGAN/VIRGINAL

James David Christie

JOHN FINNEY, CHORUSMASTER

John Finney holds degrees in organ performance from the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music and the Boston Conservatory. He studied at the North German Organ Academy with Harald Vogel and the Academy for Italian Organ Music with Luigi Tagliavini. Other teachers have included David S. Boe and James David Christie (organ) and Lisa Goode Crawford (harpsichord).

Mr. Finney has performed solo recitals throughout the United States and Europe

and appeared as organist and harpsichordist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the New York Bach Ensemble and the Smithsonian Chamber Players. Currently director of music at the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church, Mr. Finney plays regularly with the Handel & Haydn Society and is chorusmaster for the Boston Early Music Festival Chorus. He is also conductor of the Heritage Chorale in Framingham.